

**OFFICE OF  
THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

**COMMISSIONING OF USS *NEW YORK***

**REMARKS BY  
GEN. JAMES T. CONWAY,  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2009**

GEN. JAMES T. CONWAY:

Good morning distinguished guests. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. Duty outside of Washington, D.C., is always good duty, but to be in New York at the commissioning of an amphibious ship is an especially glorious day for a Marine.

Since 1775, when the Continental Congress created the Navy and the Marine Corps, sailors and Marines have gone down to the sea in ships to defend this great nation. We believe that a ship of the line has little value in home waters, except to rest or refit, and so we have defended the vital interests and the people of our great country on distant seas and shores.

As America became more powerful, the ships grew bigger and more numerous. Indeed, over the past 60 years, the Navy-Marine Corps team has known no equal. And yet, for all our strength, it can appropriately be said that the United States is a benevolent power. We have not used that power to take away lands or riches; rather, to protect our citizens, to maintain the sea lanes and to keep the peace.

Perhaps Colin Powell said it best: "American power is absolute and our international involvements have been many. But the only land we ever coveted was that we needed to bury our dead." Today, this superb ship takes its place in the fleet. For roughly the next 40 years, it will be tasked to carry its Marines forward to places most of us have never heard of.

It might be to deliver supplies from its well decks or its flight deck to help a country stricken by natural disaster; it might be to exercise or train foreign troops or other navies so that they can defend their own lands; or it might be to join other ships of Marines to deliver a blow to the enemy who threatens our people.

Whatever the task, the USS *New York* and the amphibs like her are the most flexible ships in the Navy. No other platform anywhere in the world offers the capability, the adaptability and the survivability to accomplish whatever the nation tasks. And yet the *New York*, as she sits here today, is simply a hunk of steel and cable without her crew. It is that crew of incredible young men and women that will bring her to life and will perform near-miraculous feats in the coming months and years.

Today, we're a maritime nation of over 300 million Americans. Yet, less than 1 percent — less than 3 million — wear the uniform of any service. These young men and women have volunteered to step forward and go into harm's way at a time when our nation needed for them to do so. We owe them much. They seek and they deserve our support and our respect.

The naming of any warship is a thoughtful and deliberate affair. I'm extremely proud that we have decided to name this ship to honor the sacrifice and the resiliency of our nation's largest city. As she puts to sea, the symbolism, manifested by that special steel in her bow, will be tangible. As she sails the world's oceans, she will carry the spirit, the determination and the defiance that has always been American.

I'd offer you examples. In December of 1941, the battleships of the 7th Fleet lay virtually destroyed at Pearl Harbor. By 1944, six of the eight of those battleships had been raised and refitted and helped to defeat the Imperial Japanese Navy. During 2001, with purpose and resolve, American workmen in Washington, D.C., labored at a feverish pace to complete the repairs on the west walls of the Pentagon. The building was rededicated at a ceremony on September 11, 2002.

In May, 2006, a Marine gunnery sergeant was medevaced from a landing zone in Fallujah with his left leg shot away. Eighteen months later, that same Marine walked off a helicopter in Iraq on his prosthetic leg in that same landing zone to begin a new tour of duty. The message, then, that this ship, after today, will carry to the rest of the world is that you can hurt us — you may even make us bleed — but that we'll be back. And you cannot — you will not — change who we are or what we believe.

For Commander Jones and the crew of the *New York*, I envy you your assignment. I encourage you to recruit the best cooks in the Navy and to build the best boxing team in the fleet. As for the Marines onboard, you would do well to remember the words of George Orwell. He said, our countrymen should sleep well in their beds at night knowing that rough men stand ready to visit violence on those that would do us harm. Ladies and gentlemen, tonight and for the next several decades, many of those rough men will be embarked upon USS *New York*. Thank you.  
(Applause.)

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